

Advertisement.

ANY profits, which may arise from the sale of this Sermon, are directed to be applied to the use of the Charity School in Gosport.

13.
*On the Gratitude we owe to God for the
Public Blessings of our Country.*

1026. f. 14.
13

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ALVERSTOKE,

IN THE

COUNTY of SOUTHAMPTON,

SEPTEMBER the 30th, 1792,

By JOHN STURGES, LL.D.

RECTOR of ALVERSTOKE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADEL, IN THE STRAND,
AND J. WATTS, GOSPORT.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY

RECEIVED

LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

*To the Inhabitants of the Parish of
Alverstoke, including the Town of
Gosport.*

THE numbers of French Exiles, chiefly Clergy, who have crowded to our shores for refuge from the violences and horrors of their country, afford a spectacle so striking to every Englishman, that I should have thought myself wanting in my duty, as your Minister, if I had not taken advantage of it, in order to impress on your minds, more strongly than I could at any other time, a sense of gratitude to God for our public tranquility and our public welfare

welfare. Nothing affects us so sensibly, as a comparison of our own situation with that of others which is a contrast to it.

I beg you therefore to accept this Discourse, as proceeding from an earnest desire to make Englishmen set a due value on their National Happiness, and act in such a manner as will most contribute to render it secure and permanent.

I am

Your faithful friend

And Minister

J. STURGES.

Alverstoke, Oct. 1st, 1792.

I 2 I

A

SERMON.

PSALM CXVI. 12.

*What shall I render unto the Lord for
all his benefits towards me?*

THIS is an expression of private gratitude for mercies bestowed by God on the author of the Psalm. "What return (saith he) can I make to the Lord for all the benefits, that he hath conferred on me?" It is
the

the sentiment of every pious and grateful mind, which is conscious of receiving good and being delivered from evil; which feels its own happiness, and justly ascribes it to that beneficent Being, from whom all our blessings are derived.

But Public Blessings do not demand our gratitude less forcibly, than those which affect us as Individuals. Though individuals differ widely from one another in many circumstances, which concern them only in their private character, yet there are certain general circumstances, in which all, who inhabit the same Country and live under
the

the same Government, are equally interested; and nothing can be a more proper subject of praise and thanksgiving to God, than the General and Public Happiness of a whole Nation.

It is to this I wish at present to call your attention. I wish to shew you the advantages we of this Country enjoy from the freedom and mildness of our Government, from the wisdom and justice of our Laws, from the security of our Persons and Property, and from the power and prosperity of the State; effects resulting from these Laws and this Government. I wish

B,

to

to make you set a due value on your own happiness by comparing our situation with that of a neighbouring Country; and to excite your gratitude to God for all the blessings you enjoy. This gratitude will be best expressed by endeavouring to deserve them.

If we look round the world, where shall we find a Country, in which, for the last hundred years since our rights were defined and our liberties established at the Revolution, the happiness of mankind has been so much consulted? Where exists that security to those who obey the Laws, and that
equal

equal justice to those who disobey them? For we are none of us liable to have our persons confined, our property invaded, or above all our life taken from us, by the arbitrary will of any man; the least of us cannot suffer any of these things from the greatest, even from our Sovereign. The Laws are an equal impartial rule; it is only by offending against them, that we incur punishment, and it is by them also that the punishment is determined.

By these we are forbidden to injure the persons or property of others, in order that we may possess

sefs both in full security ourselves. For mutual restraint is the foundation of this security. We are at liberty to do every thing we should; every thing, which is consistent with the good of the whole community. If we had liberty to do more, it would recoil on ourselves, because all other men must have the same; and there would be an end of all security, tranquillity, and comfort.

When any dispute arises concerning our respective rights, this is not left to the determination of an arbitrary Judge, who may be interested or corrupted; but is referred

ferred to a set of impartial persons of the same condition with ourselves, and of whom we may reject any one, concerning whose integrity or impartiality we may entertain any just suspicions.

If we should also be accused of crimes, and committed to custody that we may answer for them, it is our right to have the grounds of our imprisonment examined in one of our supreme Courts; to have inquiry made, whether the cause be legal and adequate; and if it be, whether it does not admit of our enlargement during the time preceding our Trial, on giving sufficient

entireties for our appearance. Our Personal Liberty is infringed as little as possible, consistently with the purposes of Public Justice. And when that Trial comes, it does not lie in the breast of a single Judge to decide on our innocence or guilt, or to prescribe the punishment. The same just and unexceptionable tribunal of our Fellow-citizens is to decide on the Fact; to determine, whether we are innocent or guilty. Our reputation, property, and life are placed in the hands of our Equals, of those who are in situations like our own; who are not raised by power or rank above the probability of being them-

themselves liable to the same judgment, if they should have any criminal charge alleged against them.

The venerable Legal Magistrates also, who preside in our Courts of Justice, assist and instruct our Juries (as by their superior knowledge they are well qualified to do) in forming this judgement, but they do not form it for them; and when they deliver the Sentence of the Court, this sentence is not their own, but that of Law, not made for the occasion, but prescribed by an equal and impartial rule, applicable to all degrees and all ranks of our people.

Such

Such is the Liberty and Security we enjoy under the excellent Constitution of our Country. If any should be so unreasonable, as not to be satisfied with these, but to require Equality, as well as Liberty and Security, they should be told, that in a nation like our's, hardly in any nation, certainly in any one much civilised, it cannot be had, or at least cannot be preserved. If it were to exist to day, it would cease to exist tomorrow; and if it could exist, it would not be desirable, or promote the general happiness and welfare.

For

For Nature, or rather God the Author of Nature, has not made all men equal; but has given them different tempers, inclinations, and abilities. If all property were at once to be equalised, the causes of inequality would immediately begin to operate; the attentive, the industrious, the frugal, and the intelligent will acquire, what the careless, the indolent, the extravagant, and the stupid must lose. Would you take away the rewards of industry and attention? Is it fit, that the prudent man, who preserves and improves his own, should not be in a better situation

C, ————— than

than the spendthrift, who squanders away not only his own, but (if he can get it) his neighbour's also? Is the man of slow parts and an unimproved mind to be put on the same footing with those, who by their capacity and knowledge are qualified to discharge well the most important offices of Society?

It is not only impossible, that such a general Equality should obtain; but the difference of ranks and employments is necessary to its welfare. "For as we have many members in one natural body, and all the members have not the same office;" so is the great social body

com-

composed of different parts, which have all their different situations and functions assigned them, and all concur by their union in promoting the general welfare; which as much demands the labor and bodily powers of the Peasant and the Mechanic as the knowlege and intellectual abilities of the Magistrate and the Statesman.

From a body thus composed, where all the parts duely perform their respective functions, result public happiness and prosperity. Hence is it, that in this country under the protection of our mild and free Government we see Arts flourish

flourishing, Agriculture extended and improved, Learning and Knowledge cultivated; that we have seen this Country during a century resisting, and sometimes conquering, nations superior to herself in territory and population; that we have seen her rise, after she had been depressed by a combination of almost all the powers of Europe, to a height of national wealth and public prosperity; of which History hardly furnishes an example.

If this general happiness extended itself to every class of our people without exception, we should as a nation be more fortunate, than the

con-

condition of human nature seems to admit; if there were not among us too many, who with all their exertions are almost or altogether unable to procure the most bare and scanty subsistence. It is indeed an extreme of inequality, that we cannot look on without compassion and concern; and the Laws of our Country have endeavoured to provide a remedy for the distresses of it, and to afford a reasonable support to the Poor by contributions levied on others, comparatively Rich. Besides also these legal provisions, what Country offers more voluntary assistance, when any great and unforeseen calamity demands it?

Where

Where is benevolence exerted on a larger scale in relieving the diseases and infirmities of those, who cannot procure this relief for themselves; the earnings of whose industry are cut off by sickness at a time, when they want them most.

We may add to these blessings of a temporal nature those of another kind; that we enjoy a pure and reasonable Religion, a Religion, which enjoins on us all the duties, which most tend to promote the happiness of men, as well as to obtain the favor of God; that our Established Church imposes on us none of the rigors of Superstition,

or

or encourages the extravagances of Enthusiasm; that its Forms are simple, decent, and expressive; and that it does not encroach on Civil Liberty by assuming powers, which do not properly belong to it. We give also to others the same freedom of opinion on religious subjects, which we claim for ourselves; and permit them (as it is our duty to do) to observe their own Forms and to profess their own opinions, provided it be done consistently with public tranquillity and order.

Such a view of our Country, as I have been here sketching out, would appear of itself fully sufficient

cient to excite our warmest gratitude to the Divine Providence for so many and so great blessings, without having it's advantages heightened by any comparison with other nations, whose condition may be less fortunate than our own. But unhappily there is a neighbouring Country in a situation at present so calamitous, a situation produced first by the abuses of too arbitrary a Government, and then by the violent and excessive changes made under the pretence of reforming these abuses, that the view of it ought to make us embrace our own Constitution with redoubled affection.

We

We used to value ourselves on a comparison with the Old Government of France, and feel a pride and satisfaction in the consciousness of our own freedom and security, when we saw the inhabitants of that extensive country subject to the arbitrary will of their King, or rather of his Minister, and perhaps of the Mistress of this Minister; oppressed with Taxes unequally imposed, and at the discretion of the Court, without the consent of any part of the People; and holding their personal Liberty at the mercy of the same power. But if we then valued ourselves, and on a comparison pitied them; if we considered

D,

our-

ourselves as in this respect much
their superiors; what must be now
the case, when the evils occasioned
by faction, discord, and anarchy
outweigh those of the Old Govern-
ment an hundred fold? When in
endeavouring to escape from the
excessive power of an unlimited
Monarchy, the Nation has rushed
into the opposite extreme, and has
fallen under a tyranny, a tyranny
of the worst kind, that of a furious
and sanguinary mob? When un-
der the notion of Equality all dif-
tinctions of rank have been abo-
lished, and the rights of Property
most injuriously invaded? When
victims are marked out to gratify
the

the rage and cruelty of the populace? When to be accused is to be condemned, and when suspicion is death? (And it is not death only in its simple form; but aggravated by the mockeries of justice, and embittered by insult and torture) When those esteem themselves fortunate, who can escape from a country, rendered detestable by such horrors, and polluted by such crimes?

We see, my Brethren, the numbers of those unhappy Exiles, who are fled hither for refuge from the halters, the pikes, and the swords of their Fellow-citizens; who are

es

escaped from slaughter, not that of a field of battle between armies of different nations, (which yet is sufficiently dreadful) or even between the forces of the same country, engaged in an unnatural war against each other; but from the slaughter of murder, assassination, and massacre, and that inflicted by the most profligate and desperate of mankind. It becomes us surely to receive them with commiseration and kindness, to alleviate their calamities (which yet it is in our power to alleviate but in a small degree) by shewing, that we can forget all national rivalry and hostility, that we can disregard all religious distinctions

210

tinctions, and consider the unfortunate, especially those who are so without their own fault, and perhaps for acting meritoriously, in no other light, than as Brethren and Christians, and as such entitled to the best offices of humanity and benevolence.

And now, my Countrymen, may we not well say with the Psalmist, "What return can we make to the Lord for all the benefits, that he hath done unto us?" How can we best express our gratitude to him for Blessings, most valuable in themselves; but the value of which is in our view prodigiously enhanced
by

by the misfortunes of others; by comparing their discord and misery with our prosperity and peace. We can best express it, first, by obedience and thankfulness to God, on whose will depend all human affairs, and especially those, in which the fortunes of Empires and whole Countries are involved; to whose favor we ultimately owe our Public Welfare, produced by the operation of natural causes acting under his Supreme direction. We can in the next place best express it by being lovers of Order and obedient to Law, for without Order and Law, there is no other Liberty than Confusion, no other Government than

Ty-

Tyranny; by resisting the specious pretences of speculative or factious men, who would persuade us to exchange practical and substantial good for projects of fanciful and unattainable perfection; and by supporting with affection and zeal that excellent Form of Government in Church and State, (excellen notwithstanding imperfections, to which all human institutions are liable) which has for a century past been more productive than any other both of Public and Private Happiness.

FINIS.

Tyranny: by robbing the persons
 pretences of speculative notions
 men, who would persuade us very
 exchange of physical and spiritual
 good for objects of selfish and
 unattainable perfection; and by
 supporting with affection and zeal
 that ancient form of Government
 in Church and State (excellent
 notwithstanding important
 which all human institutions are
 liable) which has for a century past
 been more productive than any
 other form of public and private
 happiness.